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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant educational reforms in Western Europe during the last two decades has been the attempt to create a system of comprehensive secondary schools. The traditional approach to secondary education was characterized by a highly stratified formal system in which students were allocated to academic, commercial, or vocational secondary schools on the basis of examinations taken at 10-12 years of age. The purpose of the comprehensive secondary school was to delay educational selection and stratification in order to provide more nearly equal educational opportunities and choices at the secondary level for children drawn from different social class origins. The dilemma of the reform is that the reduction in selection and stratification at the secondary level must necessarily create a shift of these functions to the postsecondary educational system and labor markets. A number of changes have taken place in higher education in Western Europe that reflect this tendency. These include the increase in selective admissions policies, dilution of resources, increased class differentiation among types of institutions, rises in wastage or dropout rates, and the effects of surpluses of graduates in the labor market. All of these contribute to stratification in the higher educational population. (AS)

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Program Report No. 79-B2

THE DILEMMA OF COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL REFORMS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Henry M. Levin*

February 1979

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Henry M. Levin*

February 1979

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The analysis and conclusions of this report do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of these organizations.

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THE DILEMMA OF COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL REFORMS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Abstract

One of the most significant educational reforms in Western Europe during the last two decades has been the attempt to create a system of comprehensive secondary schools. The traditional approach to secondary education was characterized by a highly stratified formal system in which students were allocated to academic, commercial, or vocational secondary schools on the basis of examinations taken at 10-12 years of age. The purpose of the comprehensive secondary school was to delay educational selection and stratification in order to provide more nearly equal educational opportunities and choices at the secondary level for children drawn from different social class origins. In this essay, it is argued that the dilemma of the reform is that the reduction in selection and stratification at the secondary level must necessarily create a shift of these functions to the post-secondary educational system and labor markets. That is, as long as substantial inequality and hierarchy exist in the occupational and earnings structures of Western European countries, any increase in equality at one educational level must necessarily shift the responsibility for allocation of individuals social roles to a subsequent level. This essay documents the increasing stratification and selection functions being undertaken by higher educational institutions and the labor market in Western Europe as well as some of the possible consequences of this shift.

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The Dilemma of Comprehensive Secondary School Reforms in Western Europe[1]

HENRY M. LEVIN

Introduction

One of the most important educational reforms in Western Europe of the last 2 decades has been the attempt to create a system of comprehensive secondary schools. The traditional educational systems of Western Europe have been characterized by a dual approach to secondary education consisting of academic secondary institutions (e.g., *Gymnasium* and *lycée*) that prepared youth for the universities, on the one hand, and secondary schools devoted to commercial and vocational studies for preparing youth for the labor market on the other. The result was that students were allocated by examinations and other devices at a rather early age—between 10 and 12 years of age—to their future careers by virtue of the type of secondary education that they were able to obtain. To a great extent the criteria for selection for each type of institution were very closely tied to the social class and family background of the students, in that children from wealthy and more educated families dominated the academic secondary schools, while those from more modest origins were found in the vocational and commercial schools.

By the late fifties and early sixties, virtually every Western European nation had initiated legislation or plans either to combine all secondary courses of study into comprehensive high schools that would be attended by all youth at that educational level (as in Sweden) or to initiate a common junior secondary school so as to postpone specialization until the senior secondary level (as in France).[2] In theory, these changes would permit young people from a variety of backgrounds to obtain training in both academic and vocational areas, if they so chose, and they would also permit a career choice or a change in career orientation at a much later date than the more traditional forms of schooling. Further, in at least some cases it would be possible for students who did not graduate with

[1] The author appreciates the assistance of Rita Duncan and Joanne Kliejunas in preparing the manuscript.

[2] Good descriptions and analyses of trends in Western European secondary education are *Development of Secondary Education* (Paris: OECD, 1969) and Torsten Husen, *Social Background and Educational Career* (Paris: OECD, 1972), chap. 4.

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the traditional academic credential, such as the Abitur or Baccalaureat, to enter the university after receiving the leaving certificate in other courses of study.

The historical discussions underlying these reforms were based on two types of rationale. First, it was argued that under the traditional system the schools tended to reinforce class differences by providing a more elite education for those students from wealthier class backgrounds than for those from poorer ones.[3] Since these educational differences were translated in a rather direct way into similar differences in such attainments as occupational status and income, it was argued that the traditional educational system tended to reproduce the class structure from generation to generation. Accordingly, it was believed that alterations in the structure of secondary education toward the comprehensive school would increase the democratization of educational opportunities and social mobility.

Second, it was asserted that the societies themselves suffered a loss of talen from the early selection and channeling procedures.[4] The great potential artists, inventors, statesmen, musicians, and scientists who lacked the necessary advantages to obtain elite primary schooling and to have the examination performances and orientations that would be necessary to obtain entrance to an academic secondary school would be relegated to lesser paths of study and careers. Thus, it was believed that the traditional system of secondary education failed to develop much of the talent that was latent in families of lower social class and that this loss of talent was necessarily creating a society with less vitality, productivity, culture, and progress than one that identified and developed the talents of all of its members.

The purpose of this essay is to assess the role of the comprehensive secondary school reforms and the dilemma that they raise in satisfying their putative intentions. More specifically, it will be argued that the schooling systems of Western Europe serve dual functions. On the one hand, they must contribute to reproducing wage labor for the systems of monopoly capitalism that dominate the Western European economies; on the other, they must represent the primary agent for providing equality and mobility to the vast majority of the populations of these countries. But there is a basic incompatibility between these two roles, if

[3] See Husen, ibid; also see Torsten Husen, *Social Influences on Educational Attainment* (Paris: OECD, 1975).

[4] This view is discussed extensively in Torsten Husen, *Talent Equality and Meritocracy*, Europe 2000, project 1, vol. 9 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). However, it is too abstract to evaluate with respect to educational reform, so it will not be treated further in this essay. It might also be added that it is an intellectual view rather than a political issue. In contrast, the argument for equality is both concrete and political.

the reproduction needs of capitalist production require highly unequal educational outcomes while the ideology of the educational system tends to inspire expectations and policies of greater equality and schooling expansion to satisfy the aspirations for social mobility.

To a large degree, the history of schooling in Western Europe is reflected in the struggle between these two goals. The main focus of this study is to provide an interpretative framework for understanding the impact of the comprehensive school reform within this conflictive framework. The more traditional secondary school placed a greater emphasis on reproduction, stratification, and hierarchy than on equality of opportunity or outcome. In contrast, the comprehensive secondary school movement represents an attempt to place relatively greater weight on the egalitarian aspects of secondary education while reducing the purposive reproduction of inequalities in worker characteristics at this level. In this essay, I will suggest the ways in which the educational system is both resisting and accommodating the reforms while ultimately shifting the reproduction and allocation responsibilities to other levels of schooling and institutions.[3]

The dilemma that faces the movement toward comprehensive secondary schools is one that faces all liberal educational reforms that attempt to equalize educational opportunities under a system of monopoly capitalism. As long as the structural inequalities of capitalist production and their associated inequities in adult status persist, the total system of schooling must continue to reproduce those inequalities. This means that greater equality in educational treatment at the secondary level must necessarily be compensated by increasing inequalities at the postsecondary level and in the translation of education into occupational positions in the labor market, if the capitalist work force is to be reproduced. That is, the unequal preparation and allocation of workers for the work hierarchy will require compensating inequalities at some higher level if egalitarian educational reforms are introduced at a lower level.

Functions of Schooling and Implications for Egalitarian Reforms

The incompatability of egalitarian educational reforms with efficient reproduction of wage labor for the occupational structures of monopoly capitalism can best be understood by examining the role of schooling in more specific terms. Analysis of the functions of schooling in advanced capitalist societies suggests three interrelated roles: (1) reproduction of skill requirements for capitalist production; (2) reproduction of social

[3] These conflicts are treated at a more general level in Henry M. Levin, "Educational Opportunity and Social Inequality in Western Europe," *Social Problems* 24, no. 2 (December 1976): 148–72.

relations of capitalist production; (3) reproduction of ideology of education as an appropriate allocator of occupational position and associated belief of social mobility and equality through education.[6]

Reproduction of the skill requirements of the workplace represents a rather widely accepted function of schooling. Whether these represent specific technical skills that are useful only to particular jobs or general ones such as numeracy or literacy that provide access to a variety of jobs and to further training is less important a distinction than the overall role of skill formation. From a Marxian perspective this aspect of schooling contributes to labor as a force of production by increasing its productivity while shifting much of the cost of that preparation from the capitalist to the population itself.

A second and closely related function of the schools is their preparation of the young for the social relations of capitalist production.[7] Basically, the conditioning of youth to an organizational context dominated by hierarchy, specialization of function, competition for rewards, and alienation from the process and product of their schooling activity tends to replicate and reproduce the value, attitudes, and expectations for reproducing the social relations of the capitalist workplace. As Bowles and Gintis have demonstrated, the organizational aspects of schooling have contributed to the formation of workers who are readily integrated into the capitalist system of production. In this way, the schools serve to cement the control and domination of the capitalist class over its work force and the extraction of surplus for the capital accumulation process. To a large degree the fact that the labor force tends to be divided against itself, to seek extrinsic rewards rather than intrinsic satisfaction from its work, to be disciplined and docile within the capitalist work context, and to accommodate the harshness of capitalist work life is a reflection of years of conditioning along the corresponding dimensions of the schooling process.

Finally, the schools serve an important ideological role in contributing to the belief that positions in the capitalist hierarchy are determined primarily by merit as reflected in the educational attainment of the individual.[8] That is, schooling is seen as a legitimate device for allocating occupations and income, and social mobility and equality appear to be

[6] This analytical framework is presented at greater length in Henry M. Levin, *Workplace Democracy and Educational Planning* (Paris: International Institute of Educational Planning, UNESCO, 1978.

[7] An extensive analysis is found in S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic, 1976).

[8] See the heavy emphasis on the ideological component of schooling in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127–86; and Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, *L'Ecole capitaliste en France* (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1975).

possible if only one is bright enough and industrious enough to obtain sufficient education. Taken together, these ideological components suggest a legitimacy to educational credentials as a device for allocating jobs and social positions as well as the view that social mobility is determined by one's diligence in educational endeavor. To a large degree this ideology underlies the strong demand for increased educational participation and expansion as families have attempted to improve the social position of their offspring through the schooling vehicle. Further, this incentive for educational expansion has created such a strong demand for more schooling that compulsion is not necessary to assure adequate numbers of skilled and appropriately socialized workers for the expanding system of capitalist production.

But while all three of these functions have been important to an understanding of the role of schooling in the expansion of capitalism and the process of capital accumulation, there is a basic incompatibility among them. For, as the schools have become the primary hope for social mobility for the vast majority of the population, the expectation of fairness in educational opportunities has become an important part of the prevailing ideology of schooling. That is, in order to assure a semblance of justice and openness in the quest for social mobility among students from different social origins, the schools must provide an appearance of equality of treatment or democratization of opportunity. Yet the very political, economic, and social advantages possessed by families from higher social origins will assure that their children will be able to obtain better and more education than youth from more modest backgrounds. That is, in a capitalist system the schools will tend to reproduce the social class hierarchy from generation to generation so that educational differences among children will contribute to preparing them for social positions similar to those of their parents.

This tendency for the schools to reproduce the hierarchy of labor requirements for the unequal relations of monopoly capitalism while representing the principal instrument for assuring democratization of opportunity and social mobility creates a dilemma. On the one side there will be persistent attempts to adopt educational reforms that will remove the effects of social class on the structure and operations of schools in order to fulfill the expectations of equality of opportunity. But on the other side there will be pressure to continue to select, prepare, and allocate students differentially within the educational system to prepare them for the unequal roles of capitalist production. In short, there is a basic incompatibility between liberal educational reforms that proceed from the ideology of equal opportunity and the antiegalitarian requirements for socialized workers of the capitalist work hierarchy.

The history of education in both Western Europe and the United States is characterized by tensions and struggles between liberal political forces pressing for equality and the economic ones pushing for inequality. While the traditional European secondary school was premised upon the provision of highly unequal educational opportunities according to the social class origins of students, the system functioned very efficiently in preparing and allocating workers in an uncomplicated way to the different levels of capitalist production. The academic secondary schools selected relatively few persons who would proceed to the university to prepare for executive and professional occupations. The vocational secondary schools prepared appreciably more persons for the skilled occupations, and the preponderance of the population was trained only to the compulsory schooling level or less with prospects for only semi-skilled or unskilled work and high levels of unemployment or underemployment. Depending upon the amount and type of education that each person received, the allocations to the university or to the occupational structure were straightforward, although hardly conducive to a high level of social mobility.

But the movement toward a more nearly uniform secondary educational experience and opportunity has meant that the secondary school can no longer be relied upon as the crucial institution for selecting and preparing youth for the differential skills, values, expectations, and behavior to fill the rungs of the capitalist work hierarchy. Increased equality at the secondary level must be compensated by increased inequality at some higher level, if the reproduction needs of capitalism are to be met. In the remainder of this essay, I will suggest the accommodations of both the system of postsecondary education and the labor market to preserving the task of reproducing workers for the unequal positions of the capitalist hierarchy while secondary education becomes more equal.

The Impact of the Comprehensive Secondary School Movement

The form and implementation of the comprehensive secondary school movement have varied considerably from country to country in Western Europe. While these differences will not be reviewed in any detail in this interpretive essay, it is important to note the general features that characterize the movement.[9] The central conception that dominates

[9] A good general source is *Development of Secondary Education*. Further, each country has documents prepared by its Ministry of Education that provide a description. Excellent discussions and analyses are also found in the *Review of National Policies for Education* undertaken by OECD and published in recent years for many European countries. For example, see the volumes of the Netherlands (1976), Sweden (1969), England and Wales (1975), France (1971), Norway (1976), and

the approach is the attempt to increase the commonality of options, experiences, and results at the secondary level with a resulting move toward greater equality of access to the university and other forms of postsecondary education. The structural reform of the secondary school has revolved around the attempt to establish a common school at the junior secondary level for all students while attempting to restrict specialization of studies to the senior secondary level. In some countries the senior secondary schools are also comprehensive, with opportunities for students to undertake both general or academic and vocational studies.

The overall attempt is to provide a common set of options for all students until a relatively late period of secondary school, although there are large differences in implementation among countries. For example, fully comprehensive secondary schools on a national basis are found only in some of the Scandinavian countries. In Sweden the secondary schools are fully comprehensive and enroll a majority of youth of secondary school age.[10] In contrast, West Germany has made almost no progress toward implementing its plans for comprehensive secondary schools, and other countries are found to be between these two cases.[11]

However, there are other aspects of the comprehensive secondary schooling movement that are also important, even though they do not derive from the movement toward a comprehensive school program itself. These derive from the concomitant attempt to increase access to the university and postsecondary opportunities more generally for students who do not pursue the traditional academic secondary leaving certificate.[12] While traditionally only holders of the academic secondary

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Italy (1969), all available from OECD in Paris. Also see W. R. Fraser, *Reforms and Restraints in Modern French Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971); S. Marklund and Par Soderberg, *The Swedish Comprehensive School* (London: Longmans, 1967); Arthur Hearnden, *Education in the Two Germanies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); a comparative analysis for France, West Germany, Sweden, and England in Arthur Hearnden, *Paths to University: Preparation, Assessment, Selection* (London: Schools Council Publications, Macmillan Education, 1973); and the comparison of the Western European countries included in the International Study of Educational Achievement in A. H. Passow et al., *The National Case Study: An Empirical Comparative Study of Twenty-one Educational Systems* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

[10] For discussions of the dynamics, see Arnold J. Heidenheimer, "Achieving Equality through Educational Expansion: Problems in the Swedish Experience," *Comparative Political Studies* 10, no. 3 (October 1977): 413–32; and Rolland G. Paulston, *Educational Change in Sweden* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968).

[11] A thoughtful discussion of the West German situation is Hans N. Weiler, *The Politics of Educational Innovation: Recent Developments in West German School Reform, a Report Prepared for the National Academy of Education* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, School of Education, 1973). A very useful analysis of the comparative politics of the Swedish and West German reforms is Arnold J. Heidenheimer, "The Politics of Educational Reform: Explaining Different Outcomes of School Comprehensivization Attempts in Sweden and West Germany," *Comparative Education Review* 18, no. 3 (October 1974): 338–410.

[12] For a discussion of trends, refer to Jean-Pierre Pellegrin, "Admission Policies in Post-Secondary Education," in *Towards Mass Higher Education* (Paris: OECD, 1974), pp. 63–104.

leaving certificate were eligible for the university, the comprehensive secondary school movement was also associated with a broadening of eligibility requirements for postsecondary studies. Under this liberalization, students with other secondary leaving certificates outside of the general or academic program have become eligible to attend at least those branches of the university that were appropriate to their area of training.

Finally, the movement toward comprehensive secondary education has also witnessed an opening of other routes to the university through providing an alternative set of requirements with respect to age, examination, a short course of preuniversity studies, or another alternative route. Thus, in West Germany, with its recalcitrance at initiating comprehensive schools, there has existed the *zweiter Bildungsweg* or second path to the university for those students who have not taken the *Abitur*.[13] Although these are mostly older students who have worked and studied simultaneously for a number of years before being eligible to enter the university, they have represented a significant portion of students in German universities in recent years. Thus, the concept of the comprehensive secondary school has been extended beyond the school itself to a broadening of the admission requirements for higher education.

Before looking at the impact of these reforms, it is important to stress that they have tended to be very controversial. In countries like West Germany, there has been immense opposition from spokesmen for industry, commerce, the state educational authorities, and leaders of the two major political parties.[14] Thus it is little wonder that Germany has made so little progress in the direction of implementing the comprehensive school. But even in countries like England with a rather complete comprehensive approach, there has been "backlash" in recent years. For example, a recent editorial in the *Sunday Times* expressed: "Many comprehensive schools, like many high rise flats, are a product of white-hot social brutalism of the early 1960's. Vast and chaotic, the worst of them have achieved the opposite effect from what their creators intended. Far from giving every individual child a new and fair chance, these have depersonalized education, lowered teaching standards and made school an unhappy place to be. Moreover, the comprehensive idea, although capable of many interpretations, has been supported by an ideology which tended to encourage the worst excesses. Its most voluble prophets proposed an extreme model as the ideal." The writer goes on to call for "schools of choice" supported by direct grants or vouchers to once

[13] Another example of an alternative route to the university in West Germany is the *Fachoberschule;* see J. P. E. Hall, "An Alternative Way to Tertiary Education: West Germany's Fachoberschule," *Comparative Education* 10, no. 2 (June 1974): 121–29.

[14] See Heidenheimer (n. 11 above).

again provide variety in education.[15] The point is that the comprehensive school movement is still highly politicized, with many countries having failed to fully implement even the plans on the drawing board. Even when the plans have been realized, they are not immune to present and future political attack and alteration.

There are two principal effects of the comprehensive school movement that might be examined within secondary education. They are the extent to which the schools have tended to equalize resources devoted to secondary education among children drawn from different social origins and the extent to which they have tended to equalize the completion of secondary school and access to postsecondary education among youngsters from different backgrounds.

Utilizing the study of International Educational Achievement, Richard Noonan examined the relationships between the provision of educational resources to students and student social class background for data collected in 1964.[16] Seven Western European countries were included in his analysis. In general, it appears that the countries that were characterized as comprehensive showed weaker relations between school expenditures and the social class background of students than those countries with more selective secondary schools. Thus, there is some evidence that comprehensive schools are associated with more egalitarian patterns of resource allocation.

This raises the question of the degree to which comprehensive secondary schools provide an equalizing effect on student achievement among different social groups. Both the earlier International Education Association (IEA) study of mathematics achievement and the later ones of reading, foreign languages, science, and literature found that the family background of the student was the best predictor of student achievement among the Western European countries in the IEA sample.[17] However, given the indication that school resources are distributed more equitably in systems of comprehensive schools and that the structure of such schools is more equitable than that which is found in selective secondary schools, it is important to ascertain whether the comprehensive school approach tends to reduce social-class-related differences in achievement. Noonan could find no such independent effect of the

[15] *London Sunday Times* (September 25, 1977).

[16] Richard Noonan, *School Resources, Social Class, and Student Achievement* (New York: Wiley, 1976), pp. 84–89.

[17] For a summary, see Robert Thorndike, "The Relation of School Achievement to Differences in the Backgrounds of Children," in *Educational Policy and International Assessment*, ed. A. Purves and D. Levine (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1975), chap. 4. Other empirical summaries for the Western European and other countries in the IEA sample are found in David A. Walker, *The IEA Six Subject Survey: An Empirical Study of Education in Twenty-one Countries* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

comprehensive school on the distribution of achievement results.[18] Thus, there exists no evidence that the comprehensive schools have altered the traditional relation between social class origins and academic achievement as reflected on standardized achievement tests.

Overall, then, the traditional inequalities in educational achievement along social class dimensions seem to be reproduced within the comprehensive secondary framework. Whether this is due to a failure to implement properly comprehensive education or to the dominant effect of social class on educational achievement even within the comprehensive framework is not ascertainable on the basis of existing studies. Indeed, more refined studies of the effects of existing comprehensive schools on achievement patterns are needed before one can even determine their potential in this direction. However, it is reasonable to surmise that much of the differential reproduction of students for capitalist work relations continues to be carried out at the secondary level, even after the existing comprehensive reforms have been initiated.

But if the comprehensive secondary school has met strong opposition to implementation in some countries and continues to reproduce the traditional pattern of achievement by social class of student, it has surely had the effect of stimulating enrollments at both secondary and postsecondary levels. For example, between 1960 and 1970 annual increases in the enrollment rates of the eligible age groups were 2–6 percent at the secondary level and 4–9 percent at the postsecondary level.[19] The magnitude of these increasing rates of participation can best be illustrated by noting that a compound increase in participation rates of about 7 percent represents a doubling of participation in only 10 years.

There are several reasons that the comprehensive secondary schools have had an important role in stimulating rates of enrollments and participation. First, their existence has tended to raise aspirations for and completion of the upper level of secondary school and university attendance.[20] Second, they have tended to open additional routes of eligibility to postsecondary education by increasing the types of school leaving certificates that are acceptable at the postsecondary level as well as by establishing other paths of access outside of the traditional secondary school pattern. In the following section, we will review the impact of these

[18] See Noonan, pp. 99–100.

[19] *Educational Statistics Yearbook*, vol. 1, *International Tables* (Paris: OECD, 1974), table 20; also see *Development of Secondary Education*, chaps. 1 and 2.

[20] Husen, *Social Background and Educational Career*, pp. 116–124, discusses this assertion and supporting evidence. For a more general treatise on the factors affecting the demand for education and the evidence, see Kjell Harnqvist, "Individual Demand for Education," 2d draft, mimeographed (Paris: OECD, August 1976).

increases in enrollments on social stratification in postsecondary education and in labor markets.

Increased Social Stratification in Higher Education and Labor Markets

The traditional secondary school in Western Europe represented the principal institution for preparing students for and allocating them to different careers and occupations. But as more and more students have enrolled in comprehensive secondary schools or become eligible for higher education through alternative routes, the occupational stratification role must fall increasingly on the system of higher education and the labor market. That is, when only small proportions of the population—drawn primarily from elite backgrounds—pursue university education, there is little need for selective admissions policies or powerful stratification processes within the higher educational sector. But as increasing portions of the population have become eligible for higher education by virtue of the comprehensive secondary school and its related reforms, it is the system of higher education and the labor market that must bear increasing responsibility for the preparation and allocation of persons to the capitalist and state job hierarchy.

In short, greater equality at the secondary level must necessarily lead to greater inequalities at subsequent educational levels. In this section, I wish to review a number of changes that have been taking place in higher education in Western Europe that reflect this tendency toward accommodating the increasing burden of this role. These changes include the increase in selective admissions policies, dilution of resources, increased class differentiation among types of institutions, rises in wastage or dropout rates, and the effects of surpluses of graduates in the labor market. It will be asserted that all of these devices serve to stratify the higher educational population according to differential accomplishments by social class so that youth from upper-class origins will continue to maintain their advantaged positions over those from lower ones. More specifically, the most advantaged youth will be likely to obtain admission to the most prestigious institutions in postsecondary education, to study in the most prestigious fields, to complete their studies, and to obtain appropriate occupational positions. Persons from working-class backgrounds will be more likely to gain admission to less prestigious institutions and fields of study and will be more likely to drop out before completing degree requirements. They will also be least likely to convert their educational attainments into appropriate jobs.

Selective Admissions Policies[21]

Under the traditional approach, students with the appropriate secon-

[21] An extensive analysis is found in the two essays by Jean-Pierre Pellegrin, "Quantitative Trends

dary school leaving certificates were automatically entitled to enter the universities in those fields consonant with their certificates. While a few of the most elite institutions required examinations or other procedures for admission (e.g., *grandes écoles*), these represented an exception. However, in recent years the adoption of selective admissions policies for both particular fields of study and institutions has proliferated throughout much of Western Europe. In particular, those fields of study—such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, engineering, sciences, and, in some cases, law—which are most likely to lead to lucrative professional careers have been characterized by limited admissions policies based upon examinations or the *numerus clausus*. This term refers to the use of admissions policies based upon the ranking of the student according to his grade point average in secondary school. In the fall of 1977 about one-third of the 150,000 applicants to the fields that were most in demand among students in West Germany were rejected for admission despite the constitutional right to education for all who qualify.[22] While these students met the traditional requirements for admission, their grade point averages were not adequate to obtain places in the competitive admissions situation. Needless to say, the *numerus clausus* represents a restrictive device that hurts most the lower social classes who do not have the family background and resources to obtain the performance and grades of students from more advantaged families.

Thus, even when youth of a lower social class are able to gain access to the universities, they are likely to be in the less selective institutions and fields of study. For example, while about 25 percent of male students in Swedish higher education in 1972–73 came from workers' families and 15 percent came from families where the father had an academic degree, the percentages of working-class males studying law and medicine were 4.4 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively, with comparable figures for the higher social class group of 7.7 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively.[23] We should bear in mind that Sweden surely had the most egalitarian educational system in Western Europe, so that data for other countries would probably show even greater disparities in social class participation among the prestigious fields.[24]

Dilution of Resources

One of the effects of the expansion of the postsecondary sector generally and especially the universities has been the dilution of instruc-

in Post-Secondary Education," and "Admissions Policies in Post-Secondary Education," in *Towards Mass Higher Education* (Paris: OECD, 1974).

[22] Gunter Kloss, "West Germany: Entry Limitations Likely to Be Modified from Next Summer," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, no. 319 (December 16, 1977).

[23] Ministry of Statistics, Sweden, *Högskolestatistik* (Stockholm: Ministry of Statistics, 1976), vol. 2.

[24] See the analysis in *Education, Inequality and Life Chances* (Paris OECD, 1975), 1:168.

tional resources.[25] Specifically, the enrollments have increased at a far more rapid rate than the expansion of qualified faculty, staff, and facilities. The result is that the enormous increases in enrollments have created a reduction in the relative resources and faculty time available for instruction. The University of Rome was built for 20,000 students but serves a present enrollment of almost 200,000.[26] While this is a rather extreme case, the existence of universities with double or triple the enrollments that they were designed to serve is typical. Further, the most elite paths of study and most elite institutions (e.g., *grandes écoles*) have been less affected by this dilution than those careers and universities that have been most impacted by students from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds. For example, the Vincennes campus of the University of Paris, which is especially oriented toward students from working-class origins, has a student-staff ratio of 80 to 1, four times the French average.[27]

Rises in Wastage or Dropout Rates

The combination of poor job opportunities in the fields for which they gain admission to the university and the relatively poor quality of instruction have also served to increase wastage or dropout rates, especially among students from lower-class origins.[28] These students are most easily discouraged because they are not prepared to cope with the rigors of overcrowded classrooms and insufficient laboratories and libraries, and they can least afford to pay for such alternatives as private tutors and other instruction that will enable them to prepare for examinations. In France it has been estimated that the dropout rates during the first 2 years of university training are as high as 50 percent.[29] The Universities of Rome, Milan, and Naples are reported to have dropout rates of over 50 percent. And in such poorer areas as Palermo, only 10 percent of the students studying commerce and only 30 percent of those studying economics complete their degrees.[30]

Increased Class Differentiation among Institutions

Within the postsecondary educational sector, there is an increasing differentiation of status and training to accommodate students from different social classes. Thus, much of the expansion of postsecondary

[25] An evaluation for France is found in L. Levy-Garboua, "The Development of Mass University Education in France and the Student Dilemma," occasional paper (Paris: CREDOC at University of Paris–Nord, 1975), pp. 10–12.

[26] Uli Schmetzer, "Italy: Enrollments at Last Begin to Show Downward Trend," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, no. 318 (December 9, 1977).

[27] *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (October 23, 1977).

[28] Levy-Garbuoa also implicates rising failure rates on examinations in France (pp. 12–16).

[29] *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (October 23, 1977).

[30] See Schmetzer.

education absorbing the student from lower social class origins has taken place in short-cycle higher education institutes or technical institutes that are partially comparable to the community college of the United States.[31] In some of these institutions the student who successfully completes his course of study can continue on to appropriate subjects and levels of the university. Both admissions procedures and other factors tend to promote this course of studies as the version of higher education that is allotted to the lower-class student for giving him or her a chance at the postsecondary level.[32] Not surprisingly, it is a cheaper and more "realistic" solution for providing education for working-class youth that will prepare them for obtainable careers, since few continue on the university level. The public cost is only about one-third to one-half as much as the university for each student year,[33] and students undertake fewer years of study.

A second method of class differentiation of institutions is the new emphasis on "distance learning" and other nontraditional alternatives to the university. While much can be said about the imaginative approach of the open university in Great Britain, it is also clear that such alternatives are designed primarily for persons from working-class backgrounds who are unable to attend the more prestigious universities. Further, their principal advantage is said to be their relatively low cost per unit of instruction,[34] a factor that is important only for institutions serving lower-class university enrollees rather than students at Oxford, Cambridge, and the better-known "red-bricks."

The trend toward greater class differentiation in postsecondary education is also evident in the recent attempts to create reforms of the traditional governance and curricula of universities. In the Federal Republic of Germany the heavy student responsibility for governance of the sixties has been greatly eroded in the seventies to create institutions that are more responsive to the "needs" of the state and the business community. In France the government has created a reform to increase the influence of the business constituency on both curriculum and university policy for improving career preparation. Thus, there seem to be pressures to substitute an orientation toward the inculcation of more

[31] See *Short-Cycle Higher Education* (Paris: OECD, 1973).

[32] See the review of the West German *Fachoberschule* in Hall (see n. 13 above). Also see Samuel Bowles, "The Integration of Higher Education in the Wage Labor System," *Review of Radical Political Economy* 6, no. 1 (1974): 100–133; and Jerome Karabel, "Community Colleges and Social Stratification," *Harvard Educational Review* 42, no. 4 (November 1974): 521–62 for an analysis of these types of developments in promoting class stratification in higher education.

[33] *Short-Cycle Higher Education* provides cost estimates for various countries and types of offerings.

[34] Keith H. Lumsden and Charles Ritchie, "The Open University: A Survey and Economic Analysis," *Instructional Science* 4, no. 3/4 (October 1975): 237–92.

practical skills and expectations in place of the more intellectual and academic environment of the traditional university, particularly in those fields that are overcrowded by working-class and lower-middle-class youth.[35]

Higher Education and Labor Markets[36]

Finally, the surplus of university graduates in the labor market has increased the dependence on class background in obtaining employment. While the most advantaged youth can pursue the most prestigious careers and study at elite institutions, the student from a less advantaged background must settle for institutions and fields that offer lower prestige and few career possibilities. Thus, the high levels of unemployment and underemployment of university graduates among Western European youth are being felt most by those students from lower social class origins. Such students are likely to suffer from the fact that they are in less prestigious fields and have obtained degrees from less prestigious institutions, and they also have fewer family resources and connections for finding appropriate employment. Even if they do not drop out at an earlier stage, their labor market prospects are dimmed by the enormous surpluses of graduates in most fields. In recent years the unemployment rates for French university graduates have exceeded those for holders of the Baccalaureat. In West Germany it has been estimated that in the near future only one graduate out of three will be able to obtain a job commensurate with his or her training.[37] And the distant future does not look any brighter as the Western European economies have become bogged down with high energy costs, structural dislocations, and a general slowdown in their long-run economic growth rates.[38]

Summary of Changes in Stratification

The result of the increasing number of persons who pursue higher education as a result of the comprehensive secondary school reforms is that the postsecondary institutions are increasingly taking on the role of stratification that was undertaken traditionally by the secondary school. Through restricting admission standards by field of study, creating new institutions to differentiate roles and functions within higher education, diluting the instructional resources through overcrowding, and stimulating higher levels of dropouts, the postsecondary educational sector is

[35] Michelle Patterson, "Governmental Policy and Equality in Higher Education: The Junior Collegization of the French University," *Social Problems* 24, no. 2 (December 1976): 173–83.

[36] See Guy Herzlich, "Les Estudiants sont-ils de futurs chomeurs?" *Le Monde de l'education* (November 1976), pp. 4–13.

[37] Federal Labor Office, Federal Republic of Germany, *Studien und Berufswahl 1976–77* (Bonn, 1976).

[38] *Economic Outlook* (Paris: OECD, 1977).

accommodating the need to prepare and allocate students to the different strata of the productive hierarchy. That is, the burden of preparation for the inequalities of capitalist production and its attendant class stratification are being shifted increasingly from the secondary level to the postsecondary one. Finally, the surpluses of graduates in the labor markets are creating rising incidences of unemployment and underemployment for persons who complete their university studies, only to find that they will not obtain jobs commensurate with their training.

Consequences of the Dilemma

The overall focus of this essay was to show the dilemma that is created by liberal educational reforms that attempt to improve the democratization of educational opportunities. It was asserted that the schools must reproduce labor for the unequal work roles of monopoly capitalism while maintaining an image as the principal institutions for assuring equality of opportunity and social mobility. But progress toward the latter goal creates obstacles to satisfying the former one, and the educational system is structurally in contradiction with itself. For a movement toward greater equality will tend to obstruct the function of appropriate reproduction of labor, and vice versa.

Given the partial success of liberal political forces in achieving comprehensive secondary reforms and other associated changes in secondary education and postsecondary educational eligibility requirements, both secondary and postsecondary enrollments have expanded at prodigious rates. As increasing portions of the population have entered the system of higher education, the pressures to accommodate the role of differential preparation and allocation of students for capitalist work enterprise have shifted increasingly to the higher educational sector. The postsecondary institutions have responded to these pressures by altering their functions in the direction of greater differentiation of training according to the social class origins of students, creating a pattern of social class inequalities that has been associated traditionally with the secondary schools.

Further, the labor market has been making the final adjustment to the hierarchal needs of employers by creating high levels of underemployment and unemployment in those fields where there are surpluses of graduates. The dilemma is that reforms like that of the comprehensive secondary school place a great emphasis on increasing individual opportunity without addressing the structural inequalities for which the schools prepare their students. If the secondary schools do not address these inequalities, then the post-secondary institutions and labor markets must make the accommodations. And to a large degree the ultimate occupa-

tional positions of youth will still be determined by their social origins.

But such reforms still have consequences for social change, although not necessarily the types of changes that were anticipated.[39] Youth who pursue more education tend to increase their occupational aspirations commensurately. Further, the educational reforms themselves create an illusion that greater opportunity in higher education will actually be available for the vast majority of students. On both educational and occupational dimensions, the rising expectations of students from working-class backgrounds will vastly exceed the possibilities for persons from those origins. To a large degree these dashed expectations will increase the level of class consciousness among such students with respect to where the inequalities originate. Instead of focusing on unequal schools, the culprit begins to appear to be the unequal relations of monopoly capitalism and its supportive state bureaucracies, since even many qualified graduates from these backgrounds will not be able to find jobs appropriate to their educational attainments.

It is likely that these frustrations and feelings of dissatisfaction with both the educational system and the labor market will lead to increasing manifestations of class conflict and struggle. Individual incidents of sabotage by frustrated and underemployed workers, rising political activism by the unemployed, and other forms of disruption such as strikes (both on and off campus) are likely to increase as it becomes evident that appropriate jobs will not be forthcoming, even in the distant future.

These conflicts will place pressure on the state, capitalist enterprises, and the universities to seek a solution to the plight of an overeducated and underemployed proleteriat. Political demands for worker control of enterprises and nationalization of industry as well as increased public employment are likely to besiege both firms and governments. Coalitions of radicalized workers and students will contribute to the rising instabilities of the liberal, capitalist, Western European countries by pushing for egalitarian changes, and these groups may oppose even the traditional socialist and communist parties as being too conservative. The ultimate result of the reforms is the rapid formation of a new and highly conscious class with great potential for forcing social change. The direction of this change is uncertain, and it could stimulate a victory of the right as easily as one of the left. For example, the isolated acts of terrorism and violent protest that are associated with such movements

[39] More extensive discussions of these consequences are found in the references in n. 5 above. A comparison of theories of educational reform and its consequences for social change is found in Rolland G. Paulston, *Conflicting Theories of Social and Educational Change: A Typological Review* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, University Center for International Studies, 1976).

may be used as a pretext by the ruling classes for political repression, restriction of freedom of expression, denial of free trade unions, and the renunciation of other basic democratic rights.

What is important to recognize is that liberal educational reforms have consequences far beyond the narrow political and educational implications of their adoption and implementation. They must also be evaluated within the dynamics of class struggle in order to understand their meaning. It is time that discussion of educational reforms reflected the imperative that any significant stride for equality must ultimately go beyond the educational system to the economic order itself. To ignore this truth is to ignore the dilemma of egalitarian educational reforms generally and the comprehensive secondary school reforms specifically.